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FELLOWSHIP IN PRAYER

PHOTO BY TOM DUNHAM

SIMPLE PRAYER

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Since 1949 the purpose of Fellowship in Prayer is to promote the practice of prayer among all religious faiths whose fundamental belief is in God regardless of race, creed, or color, and whose tenets include the universal attributes of truth, honesty, justice, and mercy, that thereby there may arise a closer relation to Almighty God and a deeper spirit of fellowship among mankind.

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EDITORIAL

Imperfect Creatures

The fact that we are imperfect, that for all our intelligence, purpose, and hard work we remain unable to be what we dream of being, creatures "open to error and miscalculation," is what brings us to our knees to ask help of higher powers at last. Unless we know this fact, we are likely to go on in the insane belief that we are heroes or heroines, sulking in our tent like Achilles because the world does not give us what we want down to the last detail. If we are fortunate enough to be unfortunate, however, that is to say, if our lives do not stay sealed off from reality because of the comfort of the privilege or protection in which we are wrapped, we eventually, with a great deal of pain of every kind, arrive at the soul-saving fact of our imperfection—call it what you will, weakness, wickedness, or sickness.

The experience of discovery of my own imperfection had a most unexpected effect upon my attitude. It seemed to provide me for the first time in my life with some sense of my own place in the scheme of things. In other words, once I became aware of imperfectness, my uncertainty about myself—was I better than other people or worse?—was I outcast or specially chosen?—turned into the knowledge that I was only one creature out of billions—equipped me with a willingness to abide by a Will greater than my own, showed me my limitations, and permitted me to treat with understanding and love the often irritating imperfections of my fellow-creatures. Instead of seeing myself as a heroic image in my head, I saw myself as human. And in this fashion, it seems, all of us find our humanity and by means of it find God—or at least the first dim glimmers of His existence too.

When I was becoming aware of these matters, I remember, I wrote something in these pages about the qualms I suffered about approaching God one to one—at the far end, the image was, of a long red carpet. Such a first interview struck me then as too awesome to be gone through. Several friends wrote to counsel with me over this feeling of utter unworthiness, putting it for my benefit into theological perspective, translating it encouragingly into religious psychology. Their advice was kind but too intellectual to be of use.

Doing it in the only way I could, which was my own muddled way, I found over the years that followed that I was most comfortable and indeed most open to this sort of experience if I looked for it not by my-self but in the company of other worshippers. I found, in fact, that it was from others that I received the answers I was hunting for, that it was from others, as imperfect as I (and some worse), that I began to experience the joy of knowing reality.

This joy surprised me. I had never felt it before. One of the most delightful things about it was its enormous variety, so different from the grim, glum repetition of the same old thoughts and ego-satisfactions I had been obliged to be joyous about before. There were many more parts to reality than I had realized, many more feelings than I had supposed, much more connection between myself and others than I had ever dared imagine.

Although I had been raised to St. Paul's exhortation to pray without ceasing, I did not understand what the words meant until this newfound comfort and joy of mine sometimes disappeared to be replaced by my former anxieties, dreams of a self that would compensate for them, and a great deal of dissatisfaction and discomfort. I could not stand this retrogression and, as a result, I began to see that I was going to be able to keep my serenity and maintain it only by means of vigilance and effort. The willingness I had been able to summon up to find this new world was going to have to be kept going daily, I saw, sometimes even hour by hour or minute by minute.

One of the most unexpected discoveries was that my imperfections—which I had begun to regard as practically holy requirements for the life of the spirit—were going to have to be worked on, that if I was to go on enjoying the joy of my new existence I was going to be obliged to deserve it by trying to be less imperfect than I was. Less imperfect, mind you, rather than more perfect. . . And so it goes on, with a setback this morning and (hopefully) some progress this afternoon. And so it will go on. To pray without ceasing, I now see, is the effort each of us must make. It is our life. —P.G.

•

FEELING becomes prayer in the moment in which we forget ourselves and become aware of God. When we analyze the consciousness of a supplicant, we discover that it is not concentrated upon his interests but on something beyond the self. The thought of personal need is absent and the thought of divine grace alone is present in his mind. Thus, in beseeching Him for bread, there is one instant, at least, in which our mind is directed neither to our hunger nor to food, but to His mercy. This instant is prayer.

—ABOUT PRAYER by Abraham J. Heschel

A MATTER OF BALANCE

Studying T'ai Chi with a Zen master . . . .

by Elaine Cunningham

MASTER LIANG leads T'ai Chi Chuan each morning at seven, each evening at five. On a summer-afternoon lawn, twenty or more people gathered, following in an approximate imitation of his movements. To a first-time spectator it seemed a graceful, measured dance being done in unison . . . very pretty. Simple, easy, effortless, it encouraged the spectator to become a participant. Eyes on the master, half a beat behind, comprehending neither the postures nor the progressions, we move—and confusion grows.

"Practice! Practice!" says Master Liang. "Gradually, gradually learn!"

Slowly, patiently, he repeats a series of moves and takes us on to another. And another. Correcting, demonstrating, he leads. Attention to detail must be given, for if one is practicing incorrectly one is learning but the result will not be T'ai Chi.

The simple dance is also a defense system. It is also a breathing system. It is also a meditation. It is a way of life. We do not know T'ai Chi. We *do!*

"Do not lose your energy," says Master Liang, pointing to a foot. "Do not block energy. Tense, no good. Relax, but alert. Soft, but ready."

We practice. Unquestioning, we follow. Ignorant, but willing.

The moments of discovery begin. A posture is in balance and one feels the difference. A move done rightly leads with natural inevitability to the next. It flows, the completion of each action freeing one for the next. But what is this? As the direction changes, the progression changes. There are moves repeated but not in the same order. What is appropriate to North does not apply to West. We move through the Changes.

"Test ground with foot before advancing. Perhaps stone lies in your path. Always alert. Be ready to move in any direction. Do not overreach. Keep your own center of gravity. Balance. Balance!"

Practice, practice. Every morning and every evening Master Liang does T'ai Chi practice. Those, who come to join him, come. Those who follow, follow. He does not importune nor advertise. He does T'ai Chi Chuan.

Having risen in darkness to spend an hour in writing, he arrives to begin the practice at seven. Each morning there is the opportunity to join him. Sometimes no one appears, sometimes one. Now there are two of us in the morning. But whether alone or in company, he moves. We move. The metronome makes a rhythm for us neophytes or, in the evening, music. After the practice of the postures, he teaches the uses in defense.

For thirty-one years Master Liang has hoped for a disciple to whom he might give all of his knowledge. Students come and go. One stayed for five years and was an occasion of hope, but he too left. It would be great joy to Master Liang to find one who can go beyond him, one who can master the master. But Master Liang is over seventy years of age. He is the living example of his discipline. He does T'ai Chi.

We do Cumbres. We move. We learn to keep a balance, when to yield, when to press forward. We practice. Where once we bumped into one another at each gesture, we learn to accomodate our steps to the space, not to overreach nor topple over backward. To make the changes appropriate to the direction.

As we do Cumbres steadily, quietly, we attract those who are ready to

Photo by Cliff Moore

move with us. Some join in briefly, some for longer periods. We allow. We offer the opportunity. We go through the motions: results will take care of themselves. We do Cumbres. It takes practice to eliminate distractions, cross-purposes, but little by little they go. Public dining-rooms and lodgings have gone. We grow simple and, hopefully, more simple.

Some say Cumbres is a place. Some say it is people, work, an idea. Cumbres is a way of life. It is process. It is being. It is becoming Cumbres.

The Buddhist

Great Vows For All

However innumerable all beings are,
we vow to enlighten them.
However inexhaustible delusions are,
we vow to extinguish them.
However immeasurable the Dharma teachings are,
we vow to master them.
However incomparable the Buddha-Truth is,
we vow to attain it.

"I was just a child
with lots of things to learn
before I died . . ."

BRIDGES

by Emily Sargent Councilman

I WAS SIX or seven when I first had the scarey dream about bridges—first, a wooden bridge with thin creaky boards, next a cardboard bridge, and, finally, one of tissue paper—with water rushing underneath. In the dream, I knew I had to cross over all those bridges. I had to, to get where I was going.

The first one I managed all by myself, walking on tiptoe, holding onto the railing; and, safely across, falling down on the ground and breathing hard. Next, the cardboard—and I knew I couldn't make it. I just couldn't. Ready to cry, all at once I saw our pastor standing there beside me. Without a word, he took my hand, and we walked across together.

Even the next one, tissue paper, and I hardly hearing the fast water still roaring beneath us. Weightless, we seemed to float—the bridge and both of us together. Almost like flying—our feet barely touching the tissue paper—and the bridge going with us where we were going! I waked then, remembering the scarey part, but feeling warm and safe.

I had other dreams, of course, monster-dreams too terrifying to remember clearly, when my feet, compelled to run, became mountain-heavy. It took all my strength to lift them one time more and one time more, inches ahead of the monster following me.

But I remember well the flying dreams. Fun-flying! No machines, no noise, only quiet, and me floating high above peaks and lakes that looked like toys from up there. Power, soaring power—and all mine—until I began, inevitably, to fall. On the way down, my stomach pushed itself all the way up to my throat. Even so, it was a slow-motion kind of fall, and after the first time, I always knew (I don't know how) that the falling was not for real. I knew it was a dream. After that, whenever the falling began, I knew, if I tried hard enough to open my tight-closed eyes, I would wake up in my bed, safe again. It was dreadfully hard to get my eyes open, but I always did.

Sara, my best friend, had told me the dangerous thing about dream-falling: "You will die if you don't wake up in time!"

"What do you mean, in time?" I asked, my lips suddenly dry to my tongue.

"Before you hit the ground, Silly. Before you hit the ground."

I halfway believed her. She was a whole year and eight months older than I. And sometimes I thought about it at night in the dark, before I went to sleep, especially after she told me about her bedtime prayer.

"You don't know *Now I Lay Me?*" she asked. "Everybody knows that." And she singsonged the words:

"Now I lay me down to sleep
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake
I pray the Lord my soul to take."

"I don't like it," I said. "My grandmother died when I was almost too little to remember. And she was old. Children don't—"

"O yes they do! And besides, everybody prays *Now I Lay Me.* Why don't you?"

"Well, at the table, I sometimes ask the blessing,

"God is great, God is good,
Let us thank Him for our food.
By His hand we all are fed.
Give us Lord our daily bread. Amen."

Sara hooted: "I know *that* one. But what about your bedtime prayers?"

"I just pray thank-you prayers and God-bless prayers—you know, like 'Bless Daddy, keep him safe, if he's away on a trip and 'Bless Mama, make her well.' Things like that and 'Bless all the children of the world."

"Well, you will still die if you dream you are falling and don't wake up before you hit the ground. I'm telling you. Remember that."

I did, that night and other nights before going to sleep. Sometimes I shivered and pulled the covers up tight around my head. I didn't want to die. I was just a child with lots of things to learn about, lots of things to think and feel before I died.

But it was all right after the night I remembered to think of the bridges-dream and how I always made it across, even the tissue paper one, with the pastor holding my hand. I could drift off to sleep, feeling safe, sure that I would live to cross *all* my bridges. And sure that, falling, I could always open my eyes if I tried very hard. *That Sara—she doesn't know everything!*

For I, the Lord your God,
hold your right hand.
It is I who say to you, "Fear not,
I will help you."

RNS Photo

Full of Grace and Truth

THE Christian religion finds expression in the love of those who love Christ, more comprehensibly and accessibly than in metaphysical or ethical statements. It is an experience rather than a conclusion, a way of life rather than an ideology; grasped through the imagnation rather than understood through the mind, belonging to the realm of spiritual rather than intellectual perception; reaching quite beyond the dimension of words and ideas . . . .

As it is so beautifully put in the opening chapter of the Fourth Gospel: *And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.* The Christian story is simply an endless presentation of this process of the Word becoming flesh and dwelling gracefully and truthfully among us. Whether in the ultimate silence of the mystic, such as befell St. Augustine and his mother—a silence that comprehends all that ever has been, will and can be said and understood and sensed, from the beginning of time to beyond its ending. Or in a Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity going about the world and shining their light in its darkest places. Or in the splendor of artistic creation; in the great cathedrals climbing into the sky to God's greater glory; in the glowing words, the sentient stone and paint, the swelling sounds of music. Or in the solitary soul questing for truth, in the tiniest mechanisms of our mortal existence, as in the universe's illimitable reaches. Or in the beatific soap opera of worship, with its monotonously repeated pleas, confessions and expectations, its *glorias* and its *misereres,* its plainsong and hallelujah choruses; eyes piously downcast, and knees piously kneeling on the world's cold stone. In each and every manifestation of our mortal seeking the immortal, or our temporal seeking the eternal, or our imperfect seeking the perfect. Of men reaching up to God, and God in love and compassion bending down to men.

From the book SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL FOR GOD by Malcolm Muggeridge © 1971 by The Mother Theresa Committee. Reprinted by permission of Harper & Row Publishers, Inc.

SIMPLE PRAYER

"It is learned through silent communication and shared living, much as I learned it from my grandmother. . ."

by Herrymon Maurer

NOTHING is as secret as prayer and nothing more social.

At the age of five, I lived for a time with my grandmother and came to learn of her regular but by no means rigid practice of retiring to her room some time during the afternoon and sitting with her eyes closed in a rocking-chair which she did not rock. She sat like this for seldom less than half an hour, seldom more than an hour and a quarter. The door was left open, and it was understood that she could be disturbed. From time to time she would utter the words, "Oh God!"

Although spoken quietly, the words were not really spoken at all, but drawn forth in a tone that was joyful beyond joy and sorrowful beyond sorrow, a tone so unlike any pronouncements heard in church that the possibility of their being prayer did not consciously occur to me. I was even somewhat perplexed, since I knew my grandmother was not given to vain speech. It was not for many years that I came to understand that she was simply praying.

This understanding came not by sudden enlightenment but by a slow seeping of her life into my own. She lived not on her own terms but in terms of the people she loved, and her affection was omnivorous, extending, as I came to know, from myself to the woman catty-cornered across the street who took drugs and sometimes had to have food cooked and carried to her.

My grandmother was also the delight of children, for she not only helped them but also treated them as openly and honestly as she did adults. Besides, she delighted in them. I came to learn slowly, since I was not told and did not imagine myself asking, that what went on in the rocking-chair was some sort of intensification of what went on in the rest of her life, and that this intensification was, in fact, prayer. What is prayer but the secret holding-up of all life to the light of truth?

Nowadays, I try to pray as my grandmother prayed. I know it is she I imitate, not because we talked about praying (it was not once discussed), but because the event remembered from childhood helped draw me toward simple prayer, simple prayer of the sort that unites with all others who pray in the secret manner. It is prayer with decreasing thought of self, and if any who practice it open their lives to illustrate so secret a thing, it is to point to prayer and not to self.

Such prayer is not a matter for experts. In such a matter there can be no expertise, no display of intellect, no edifice of logic, no construction of theology, nor any other aspect of the exclusiveness that leads men and women to complex explanations of the universe and, too often, to quarrels with other explainers. In private prayer, there can be only ourselves, our neighbors, and the one God who is of all faiths and who is certainly not ours alone.

AS SOON AS I came to understand that my grandmother was praying, I understood also that she was praying not about herself but about everything that happened and everyone she met. Very simply and very secretly she held everything and everyone up to God.

My grandmother generally shunned spoken conversation about religious topics and certainly never discussed with me or, I imagine, with anyone else the content of her prayers. Yet I venture to believe that the content was this holding-up to God of everyone she met and everything that happened during every day, emphasized every so often by the simple plea, "Oh God!"

I soon understood that her room was by no means the only place of her praying, but that every place was a place of prayer for her, just as every topic was a topic for prayer. Even as a child I sensed that she was an uplifting person simply because she constantly lifted things up.

This is prayer in its most simple, typical, and universal form, occurring whenever and wherever human beings do not interpose self-will between creation and truth. This prayer does not lift up oneself alone but others: it lifts up all of life, and it says no more than "Oh, God!" It exists in all faiths, in all ages, among people of all conditions. One of the schools of Chinese Buddhism holds that it is all that is needed for salvation, and I have heard Hindus declare "Ai Rama!" with an intonation not unlike my grandmother's.

Public Prayer

It is different not only in manner but in kind from private prayer. Public prayer is a speaking, often of great value, about God. It deals tersely and tremendously with themes too vast for a statement or sermon. But such praying, while it reveals something about God, reveals nothing to Him. It is intended to instruct human beings. Many of the ringing cries of the Psalms, the simple statements of St. Francis, the fevered demands of the Hasidim are essentially and deeply educational. Rare, therefore, is the public prayer that reveals to God the hidden heart of him who prays, as does, for example, the Lord's Prayer or those two remarkable utterances: "I believe, help thou my unbelief" and "Lord, have mercy on me a sinner."

Private Prayer

It is the most important activity in our lives, the only one that discovers meaningfulness in daily life and that promotes deliverance from self-worship. For if we do not pray to God, we are only too likely to pray to ourselves and, forsaking our fellows, to fall into deceit, delusion, and despair. Prayer is no soliloquy. It is not self-satisfied or self-dissatisfied musing about that false self which seems to be the center of the universe. Indeed, when fascination with self becomes confused with love of God, the reality of truth attenuates, even as the unreality of self grows, and the consequence is not only self-centeredness but misery and agitation and remorse and guilt.

By lifting up others we are ourselves uplifted, for we are brought to awareness of that divine response which is truth's greatest gift: a sense of the presence of God. Presence—the first and greatest spiritual need of all human beings—supports us, strengthens us, heals us, transforms us, and is simply with us in every circumstance of living and dying.

This sense of presence does not come about by improving ourselves psychologically or mentally. It is simply there all the time, no matter what we do and no matter whether we hear. At a time of marked trouble in my life, I was near death for a period of a month, most of which was spent in a delirium of horror. Reality disappeared, violence threatened, and time altered itself so that a single night exceeded an eon. Through all this terror and turmoil, I was quite literally taken away from fear of death and made aware of everlasting arms around me in such a manner that I knew they could not loosen.

The remarkable part of the experience is that God was present and let His presence be known to one who, so far as spriritual matters were concerned, could not be considered anything but a confused and miserable sinner. Like His rain, God lets his presence fall upon the just and the unjust. A little bit of prayer, even inadequate prayer, goes a long way.

It is in extreme situations of suffering and disaster that God's presence is all but inescapable. But He is present, of course, in the ordinary as well as the extraordinary, in the usual as well as the exceptional, except that there He is often harder to find. It is in the areas of the usual and the ordinary, however, that we are particularly called to turn to Him. That perhaps is the basic task of true prayer.

It is said that as a child learns to walk by himself, so we learn to pray by ourselves. But it is not thus that children learn. Children learn to walk by watching other people who walk and to pray by watching other people who pray.

Private prayer is learned, I believe, much as I learned it from my grandmother, essentially through silent communication and shared living. If other persons' lives are not part of our lives and if our lives are not part of other persons' lives, none of us are likely to pray to anything other than our selves. We are not likely to turn to God if we are unready to turn to our neighbors.

When one man does good to another, an angel is born.

—Hasidic Saying

A Prayer by Thomas Merton

THE chief thing that has struck me today is that I still have my fingers too much in the running of my own life. The first essential is missing. I only say I trust You. My actions prove that the one I trust is myself—and that I am still afraid of You.

Take my life into Your hands, at last, and do whatever You want with it. I give myself to Your love and mean to keep on giving myself to Your love—rejecting neither the hard things nor the pleasant things you have for me. It is enough for me that You have glory. Everything You have planned is good. It is all love.

The way You have laid open before me is an easy way compared with the hard way of my own will which leads back to Egypt, and to bricks without straw.

If You allow people to praise me, I shall not worry. If You let them blame me, I shall worry even less, but be glad. If You send me work, I shall embrace it with joy and it will be rest to me, because it is Your will. And if You send me rest, I will rest in You. Only save me from myself. Save me from my own, private, poisonous urge to change everything, to act without reason, to move for movement's sake, to unsettle everything You have ordained.

Let me rest in Your will and be silent. Then the light of Your joy will warm my life. Its fire will burn in my heat and shine for Your glory. This is what I live for. Amen, amen.

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JONI—
Her struggle to be born again

by Joni Eareckson with Joe Musser

A 1967 dive into the Chesapeake Bay was the beginning of a disaster that ended in a victory of understanding for its victim, a teenager named Joni Eareckson. That dive broke her neck and turned her into a quadraplegic who was never to regain the use of her arms and legs. It also turned her into a woman of remarkable strength and insight who moved from frustration and anger, disappointment and frustration, into acceptance of God's will for her. Following are some excerpts from her account of her struggle.

Slowly I became aware of God's interest in me. I was some sort of "cosmic guinea pig"—a representative of the human race on whom truth could be tested. All the distractions, trappings, and things were gone. God had taken them away and placed me here without distractions. My life was reduced to absolute basics. So now what? *What am I to do with my life?* I wondered. *I have no body, but I am still someone.* I had to find meaning, purpose, and direction, not just some measure of temporary satisfaction.

Even the clean, sterile sheets in the austere ward were symbolic. Eating, breathing, sleeping. Eating, breathing, sleeping. *For what purpose? How can I glorify God? What can I do?*

Yes, there has to be a personal God, I reasoned. He may choose not to reveal Himself to me in some spectacular way—but then, why should He? Why was I any more important than the next person who had to find God and purpose by faith, not sight? Why should I be different?

I told Diana of my thoughts. "Nothing is really making any sense yet, Diana. I don't know what God is doing—but I believe He is real and that somehow He knows—and understands. There's a positive aspect to my thoughts now. I'm still confused, but before, my confusion leaned toward doubt. Now it leans toward trust."

"Maybe it has something to do with your prayer before the accident," Diana suggested.

"What prayer?"

"Remember? You told me that shortly before your accident, you prayed, 'Lord, do something in my life to change me and turn me around.' Maybe this is God's way of answering that prayer."

"I've wondered about that myself. It could be. But it's sure not what I expected. And He certainly has His own timetable," I said, adding, "I don't know His purpose in this. I probably won't ever walk again. And I don't see how I can ever be happy again. I guess that's what really bothers me."

"Not being happy?"

"Yeah, I mean, if there's one thing I learned from those existentialist writers, it's 'man cannot live with despair.' Do you think I can ever be happy, Diana?"

"I don't know, Joni—I don't know."

It was hard for me to accept the fact that Donald was not God's will, God's best for me. "But, Lord, if not Donald, I believe You have someone or something better for me. I will trust You to bring it into my life." I recalled hearing a preacher say God never closes a door without opening a window—He always gives us something better when He takes something away. . .

(Continued on page 32)

A SILENT JOY

by Emma S. McLaughlin

One blessing, Lord, is all I
really need;
one woodland flower
growing by the door
where some small bird, in
passing, dropped a seed,
can make my flagging winter
spirit soar.
The spreading tent of just a
single tree
upon a lonely windswept
mountain bluff,
attesting, through its tortured
symmetry,
to weathered storms, is
miracle enough.

But You have sheltered me
with arching skies,
have strewn unnumbered
flowers at my feet,
released a dancing drift of
butterflies
and feathered song, to make
the whole complete.
Like cresting waves Your
bounty swells to bring
a silent joy that makes my
spirit sing.

THE CLOISTERS — The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

CHINESE RELIGION IN THE PRESENT

by Laurence G. Thompson

It is not defunct despite the collapse of Confucianism and the irresistible impact of modern science and technology

Buddhist monastery in the foothills of the Himalayas.

THE CHINESE civilization was, until the mid-nineteenth century, essentially an original, self-contained system. It was a civilization which historically had been superior to its neighbors, and which had indeed been the source of the high cultures of all East Asia.

This Chinese civilization was immensely long-lived, rich, and satisfying to the Chinese. It had the scope and the local variations of a grand continental scale, but the pervading unity of a great traditional culture. The only imported influence of significance in this civilization was Buddhism—which in its turn was profoundly modified in its accomodation to Chinese ways. The Chinese view of nature and man and the Chinese social practices did not change in any great measure since ancient times.

During the past century, however, China has entered a new era. Its civilization is no longer self-contained, evidently superior, or even satisfying to the Chinese people. By the rude insistence of the aggressive Western powers during the nineteenth century, and by the even more irresistible impact of modern science and technology and all that these bring in their train, China has been forced into an unprecedented situation. Part of the problem is the necessity to modernize without the gradual evolutionary process which brought Europe from medieval to modern conditions. Even more serious is the trauma resulting from the realization that the whole position of China has altered so that, far from being the center of human culture, she is now, in fact, a backward culture in a modern world.

The stresses in the religious systems are of course but one aspect of the general tearing of the fabric of traditional Chinese civilization. The impact of the confrontation with modern knowledge and Western institutions has been felt to varying degrees in many ways. Some of the most notable of these are the following:

1) The traditional naturalism and animism is challenged by science. The once serene certainty of the "gestalt cosmology" has been replaced by that sense of alienation from nature so notorious in the modern West, so far as the educated are concerned. Even the peasant masses have had their simple animistic beliefs undermined, and no satisfactory substitute has been provided to furnish some hope amid the endless suffering of their lives.

2) The religious corporation of the family has been disrupted by the growth of a new urban industrial system, by the novel attraction of individualism as manifested in Western society, and most lately by the determined efforts of the Communist regime to substitute absolute loyalty to the state for family loyalty.

3) The ancestral cult has been weakened by the disruption of the family system. It may be that this root of the Chinese traditional society

has indeed withered almost to the point of death; if this is so, the whole character of Chinese civilization will indeed be fundamentally altered.

4) The efficacy of the gods has been brought into serious question or outright rejection among the masses as the rudiments of modern elementary schooling have spread more scienfific explanations of cause and effect. Temples throughout the country have for many decades been allowed to fall into desuetude, or have been turned over to secular uses. This is a clear indication of the weakening of the folk religion once shared by the local communities.

5) Upon the collapse of the imperial polity in 1911 the whole institution of the state religion disappeared. Subsequent Chinese governments have followed the principle of freedom of religion, or rather, they have been indifferent to religion. The position of the Communist regime is of course in accord with the teaching of Marx, that "religion is the opiate of the people." There is no place in the Communist system for alternative loyalties. The current regime's policies on religion have no other objective than utilizing it in ways that can further the control of the Communist Party over every aspect of Chinese life. Where institutional machinery is useful to this objective, it may be operated under Party control: thus, as in some Eastern European countries, the state has attempted to set up its own Roman Catholic hierarchy and to organize and direct the Buddhist *Sangha* (monastic communities) through compliant puppets. Policies like these obviously have nothing to do with religion as such.

6) Buddhism and Taoism, as the only institutionalized religions of traditional China, were challenged by Christianity, which was not only the dominant religion of the West but also somehow seemed to be the only progressive religion acceptable to modern minds in the scientific era. If one regards Marxism as a religion—which it is for many intellectuals of the twenties, thirties, and forties in China—then this, too, is a Western creed offering a strong attraction to minds that formerly would have found their satisfaction in Buddhism or Taoism.

7) Religious Taoism, with its close association with magic and shamanism, seems on its way to eventual extinction, an anachronism in a world of scientific knowledge.

8) Buddhism, on the other hand, seems to be rousing from the sluggishness of several centuries. It seems to be the Asian religion most able to adapt to the modern world. Certainly its higher philosophy, far from being antagonistic to the spirit or methods of science, is readily adaptive to the new ways, regarding as it does all knowledge of the phenomenal world as on the level of relative truth... On the other hand, there are three features of Buddhism that may hinder its renaissance in modern times: one is the theory of karma and rebirth, which may not be

scientifically probable; the second is the conviction that existence is undesirable because it involves suffering, which may be unpalatable to optimistic moderns convinced that science will solve all problems; the third is the difficulty of maintaining the monastic *Sangha* in the modern world—and without the *Sangha* it is hardly possible that Buddhism could survive.

The most important casualty of these revolutionary times is Confucius. By this is meant the whole religious, ethical, social, educational, literary, and political backbone of the traditional Chinese civilization based upon the Confucian canon. If we may use the term Confucianism to indicate the Chinese great tradition, one may compare the damage done by the collapse of Confucianism in modern China with the profound influence of the scientific secularism that shook the authority of religion in the West. If one takes the most extreme view, one concludes that Confucian civilization is really dead, and that some entirely new national character must replace the old tradition. This is of course the thesis of the Communist leaders on the mainland. In the island province of Taiwan, on the other hand, one sees a conscious attempt to preserve the traditional values while at the same time modernizing the socio-economic superstructure. In Taiwan the observer can also find much evidence of the tenacity of the folk religion, the still powerful family system with its religious cement, and portents of the renaissance of Buddhism both as a popular religion and as an intellectual movement. In Taiwan there is still another interesting development, namely the post World War II expansion of Christianity—especially Roman Catholicism. While the most spectacular gains have been made among the semi-Sinicized aborigines, statistical reports also show substantial progress among Chinese. In Taiwan, therefore, one may be seeing the pattern of the future in the religious life of China: the competition for converts between Buddhism and Christianity in conjunction with a gradually declining belief in the gods and the practices of the ancient folk religion in face of universal literacy and modern knowledge.

From CHINESE RELIGION: AN INTRODUCTION by Laurence G. Thompson. Copyright © 1969 by Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Wadsworth Publishing Company, Belmont, California 90002.

Help! It's My Turn to Pray

I GREW UP in a church where prayer was considered a personal matter, between each man or woman or child and God. To pray in private was the basic idea. So when I joined a neighborhood Bible-study in which "conversational prayer" was a part, I was taken back. For a number of weeks I simply listened.

At one meeting I felt more at ease because attendance was unusually small. When the leader asked if there were any prayer requests, I mentioned my father's being very ill and possibly having to be moved to a nursing home.

Such beautiful prayers were offered for my father by members of the group that I felt I had to break my silence. But I found my palms damp, my voice hesitant, as I, in words of one syllable, praised God and thanked him for bringing everybody to the Bible-study that night.

In the weeks that followed, I found myself no less ill at ease about praying in public. Sometimes I didn't . On other days, while driving to the meeting, I would find myself composing prayers in advance so I would not sound so hesitant. Sometimes I would pray simply to please other members, knowing they needed support.

I was plagued by a constant feeling of inadequacy. I simply wasn't any good at thinking on my feet (or knees) or in any spontaneous way.

Others prayed magnificently. One was able to go on at great length in praise of Jesus, lauding Him as "wonderful," as "counselor, prince of peace, our advocate before God, our bridegroom, Son of God. . ."

I hadn't known He had so many names, and was stirred.

Another made frequent Biblical references in her prayers: "As You told us in Psalm 39," she would say, or urge God to "build a hedge around Nancy just as You did around Job."

I was impressed. How could I possible equal those prayers?

Equal them? Suddenly I saw that I was seeing prayer-time as some sort of test in which I was falling short. Worse still, recalling a minister who once told me, "Your prayers are as good as the one you pray to," I asked myself to whom my prayers were directed. I had to admit that they were for the other members of the Bible-study group. My focus was entirely wrong.

Now, however, I have learned to relax and to speak in honesty and sincerity to God. The point is that I pray to Him, not them. I no longer care what anyone thinks if what I pray is, "Lord, You know Mary Jane's needs. Please minister to her," or even "Thank You, God, for soft, furry kittens and warm cuddly dogs." These are the thoughts of my heart and I know now to whom I am telling them. —Beverly Bush Smith

The Enemy Who Must Be Loved

WE cannot change anything unless we accept it. Condemnation does not liberate, it oppresses. . . If a doctor wishes to help a human being he must be able to accept him as he is. And he can do this in reality only when he has already seen and accepted himself as he is. Perhaps this sounds very simple, but simple things are always the most difficult. In actual life it requires the greatest art to be simple, and so acceptance of oneself is the essence of the moral problem and the acid test of one's whole outlook on life. That I feed the beggar, that I forgive an insult, that I love my enemy in the name of Christ—all these are undoubtedly great virtues. What I do unto the least of my brethren, that I do unto Christ. But what if I should discover that the least amongst them all, the poorest of all beggars, the most impudent of all offenders, yea the very fiend himself—that these are within me, and that I myself stand in need of the alms of my own kindness, that I myself am the enemy who must be loved—what then?. . . Had it been God himself who drew near to us in this despicable form, we should have denied him a thousand times before a single cock had crowed.

Psychoanalyst Carl Jung speaking to a group of ministers in 1932.

This publication is yours.

Originally—that is to say, thirty years ago—it was a newsletter. Its purpose was communication between the new members of Fellowship in Prayer. News was reported, announcements made. Gradually the news became reports from all parts of the country and abroad about adventures in this or that member's spiritual existence, the announcements turned into meditations or prayers, articles, stories, or poems. Issues of the publication became pleasantly variegated, taking in all sorts and levels of experience of the prayerful life, some of them highly personal accounts of defeat and surrender, strength and hope, others funny, still others philosophical and general.

This is what this publication is all about. Fellowship. The sharing of your own most important experiences with others who also are not interested in staying on the surface of things.

Because we want the publication to go on being what it is, we invite you to send in whatever you may have written or want to write to express this side of your life.

Please address all manuscripts to: The Editor, Fellowship in Prayer, 20 Nassau Street, Room 230, Princeton, New Jersey 08540.

THE WRITER AS PRAY-ER

An interview with Madeleine L'Engle by Joseph T. Vitale

"I never write for children," Madeleine L'Engle says, "it's just that what I have to say is often too difficult for adults to understand."

And so with her unique blend of whimsy and playful sarcasm, Madeleine L'Engle explains just how she communicates her tales of adventure and spiritual imagination to a world sorely in need of both.

"I'm just a storyteller," she says, but her stories are often sophisticated "theological fantasies" in which characters have to make difficult moral choices—and live by them.

Madeleine L'Engle was born in New York City and raised Episcopalian with several years in Anglican boarding school. After her marriage (to actor Hugh Franklin) she moved to a rural Connecticut village where she settled down to write and raise three children.

Her most famous work, *A Wrinkle in Time,* won the Newbery Medal for distinguished children's literature in 1963 and has gone through forty-three printings with more than a million copies sold. Her most recent book, *Ladder of Angels,* has just come out.

Question: "When did you first become aware that you were a Christian?"

Madeleine L'Engle: "I've always known it. But I've been so angry about what certain Christians say about Christianity that I've frequently turned away. To me, Christianity is constantly falling away from what it *ought* to be. Canon West once said that a Christian is someone who

knows one, and I was very fortunate as a child to have had a second mother who was a devout Roman Catholic. She never proselytized, she just 'was.' She was a laughter-bringer and joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.

"As a young person, however, I took that aspect of Christianity completely for granted. It was the establishment that I kept having terrible battles with. I went to Anglican boarding school for six years and I've spent the rest of my life unlearning all those good, Anglican virtues."

Question: "In your book, *A Circle of Quiet,* you mention a period in your life when religion ceased to matter for you."

Madeleine L'Engle: "Religion itself always mattered to me—it was organized religion that didn't.

"When I left college, I lived on Tenth Street in Manhattan. The Church of the Ascension was on the corner and, at that time, it was open all night. I'd walk my dog about two o'clock in the morning, tie him up in the vestibule, and go to church—every night. I guess I had a very odd way of being agnostic.

"I'm a Christian agnostic because I cannot know God. To be anything but an agnostic doesn't make sense. I choose to 'believe' what I do not 'know.'"

Question: "In an era when one can choose or discard a belief as easily as a hairstyle (TM, est, Christianity, Eastern religions, etc.), why is there still such a yearning, such a restlessness for genuine religious experience ?"

Madeleine L'Engle: "For centuries, the Western religions forgot the cornerstone of transcendent experience: meditation and prayer. When I talk to young people around the country, I find that they're astounded to learn that there is actually a 'tradition' of meditation and contemplation in Christianity.

"When I was younger, we didn't have TM or est, but if we did I probably would have fallen for it because the church wasn't offering me what was legitimately my heritage. I learned about meditation and contemplation within the Christian tradition, not through the religious establishment but through people. And if true Christian unity is ever going to come about, it's going to happen through people.

"When people of good will get together, the sectarian differences are simply not there."

Question: "How have your ideas about Christianity changed through meditation and contemplation?"

Madeleine L'Engle: "I've come to realize that Jesus was not bound by time and space as we are. Not because he was not like us, but because we *should* be like him.

"It's interesting that the contemporary astrophysicist's picture of time is no longer that of a river flowing in one direction. It's much more like a tree with many, many branches. And twigs, by which you might be able to get from one branch to another. Time is a creature; it was created, it can have a beginning, and it can have an end. We can have a 'relationship' with time that's personal.

"I'm always delighted to find in books written by scientists a vindication of the knowledge of fairy tales, myths, and dreams."

Question: "Do you consider yourself a religious writer?"

Madeleine L'Engle: "Religion is such a terrible word because it means so many different things. According to how most people interpret religion, no, I'm not a religious writer. According to how I interpret the word, yes. Because in all of my books, I'm looking, I'm searching, I'm listening.

"To me, to write is very much like what it is to pray. It's a matter of getting out of the way and listening. Not imposing your own will. The great moments are not going to come unless you have an instrument ready to receive them."

(This article appeared in the November 1979 issue of *The New Review of Books and Religion.* Reprinted with permission.)

•

AND WISDOM KNOWS . . . .

by Kathleen Heidt

And wisdom knows
it's mostly questions
seldom answers.

And wisdom knows
it's mostly friendship
seldom easy.

And wisdom knows
it's mostly faith
seldom perfect.

BOOK REVIEW

The Way Out Is The Way Through

It is Harold Hughes' feeling thoughts which make a remarkable book of his autobiography *(Harold E. Hughes, The Man From Ida Grove, by Harold Hughes with Dick Schneider, Chosen Books, Lincoln, Va. 22078, $10.95).* I speak of his "feeling thoughts" because he is one of those rare modern men whose intellectual processes are invariably connected with his deepest emotions.

At the simplest level his personal story is another classic in the American tradition of starting out a nobody and ending up somebody. It starts in the fields of his native Iowa, where, he writes, "I would stand on a hillside looking up into a dark sky ablaze with stars and sense a strong impression that the One Who had created them had something special for me to do." It proceeds through football-field exploits by his beloved brother Jesse and himself (they were known as "Big Pack" and "Little Pack" from the word *pachyderm*) to marriage to a woman of enough love and strength of mind to confront him soon with the fact of his alcoholism, which had begun long before college. The technique of confronting a victim with this disease ("Either sober up or get out") was not as well understood then as it is now. It is also extraordinarily painful to do, and Eva Hughes took an enormous risk for her husband, her family, and herself. Fortunately, it worked, though neither immediately nor continuously. After staying off the booze a while, Hughes went down to Florida to help a friend with a drinking-problem and himself suffered a slip which was to set off a nationwide political furor years later. As sobriety got as firm a hold on him as it could, Hughes started to grow as a man out of narrow self-concern into genuine concern not just for his fellow-drunks in Alcoholics Anonymous, but beyond for all men and women who were sick and suffered and needed help. The account of his growth in identification with the down-and-out and lost of every kind is straightforwardly told, without a note of conceit or self-consciousness, one of the most credible records of its kind.

A truck-driver by trade, Hughes soon began to reach beyond his own problems in the business to those of other truckers, the independents, whom he organized for their own protection so that they could earn their livelihood from their labor. Out of this first reaching out to others grew his career as a leader, as a politician. Although Eva Hughes is often reported complaining of his rough language, he must have possessed something like an evangelist's ability to rouse listeners with words, for it was not long before he became Iowa's governor for three terms, then senator, and eventually dark-horse candidate for President in the

Harold Hughes

election of 1972. This was when his slip in Florida was brought out in a try to discredit him.

One of the most enjoyable aspects of this book is the variety of its cast of characters and the extent of its scenes. It moves into the homeliest homes of the Middle West, then into the governor's mansion, the U.S. Senate, and the White House. With unchanging perspicacity and warmth, it paints portraits of many farmers and truck-drivers, many alcoholics and drug-addicts, also many celebrities of the period—Eugene McCarthy, Mercedes McCambridge, Bobby Kennedy, and, most notably, President Johnson, supportive and appreciative of Hughes early on but hostile and disturbingly threatening when Hughes began to criticize the war in Vietnam.

The details of Hughes' success are all in the book to be gobbled up by readers who cannot get enough of such things, but it is Hughes' spiritual growth that is depicted with particular believability. He shows the fertile ground from which it grew—the crises caused by drinking, the pressures of political life at higher and higher levels, the unanticipated death from cancer of a beloved daughter. "The way out," he writes, "is the way through." And he maintains this toughmindedness even as he speaks of the human soul, noting without flinching that it is invariably the archconservatives of both parties who attend Senate prayer-breakfasts, having the humor to relay the following conversation between a pair of politicians when he was being touted for President:

"How could you put a man in a high-tension situtation who's had a drinking-problem? Wouldn't you be afraid he'd take a drink?"

"I don't care that he'd drink. What worries me is that he might *pray!*"

— P. G.

One of the brainiest and most charismatic of twentieth-century clergymen was Milton Steinberg, whose pulpit was at the Park Avenue Synagogue in New York City. Though he succumbed to a heart ailment at 46, Steinberg produced an avalanche of written works, one of them probably the most popular distillation of the Hebraic outlook on life in this century: it's called *Basic Judaism*. Eloquent, erudite, and effervescent, Steinberg was never satisfied with the answers of theologians and philosophers about the meaning of life, the powers of God, the working of the mind. His sermons, essays, and letters constituted an unceasing search for answers. This biography *(Milton Steinberg, Portrait of a Rabbi, by Simon Noveck, KTAV New York)* is a gripping document. —S.M.S.

JONI *(Continued from page 17)*

After my accident, I had clung to Dick, then Jay, Diana, and until now, Donald. I needed their love and support to satisfy my emotional needs. Now, however, I felt free. It was as if I had finally gained emotional independence through complete dependence on God. One day, while sittting outside in my wheelchair, I was quietly reflecting over these thoughts. Lord, I prayed, I wish I could have seen this earlier—I wish I'd have remembered that Your grace is sufficient for me. As I sat there on the quiet wooded lawn, verse after verse came to mind to comfort me. *Please, Lord, make Yourself real to me just now.*

Peace of mind and inner joy flooded my mind and soul. Then I looked up. Almost as a symbol of God's love and reassurance, a butterfly from high among the trees flutttered within inches of me. It was both startling and beautiful.

"Lord, thank You for Your goodness. Sending that butterfly at precisely this instant was a creative, subtle way of testifying to Your quiet and understated presence." I promised myself to think of God's goodness everytime I saw a butterfly.

I reflected over this most unusual and difficult summer during long outdoor retreats with the Lord. I sought to be outside and meditate on His purposes. So to occupy myself during these times, I devoted all my time and energy to my art. I found a renewed interest in drawing. And it seemed my art was getting better. There was a quality that hadn't been there before. I didn't know what it was, but others noticed the difference too.

It was a slow transition, but not as difficult as I had expected. I saw Donald in a new light, with greater understanding. He had done what was right and best, even if it hurt us both, for I know now that it hurt him as much as it hurt me.

We were both blind to the serious consequences of what such a relationship would mean. When we're in love, our love takes expression in actions. If there is nowhere to go in reality, then wishful thinking and fantasy convince us that "everything will work out." People warn us, but we choose not to believe them.

Many young people ignore reality. They know something is wrong, that a relationship won't work, but they go ahead anyway as we would have done, convinced by wishful thinking.

I look back now and thank God for our relationship. There are so many

things I never would have learned if Donald had not come into my life and left me, and so I thank the Lord for this experience. I'm especiallly grateful God helped me deal with our separation without lingering feelings of bitterness or despair.

At a Bible study one evening, a friend came up to me. Hesitantly he said, "Uh—Joni, I want to tell you something before you hear it from someone else."

"Jimmy, you don't have to say anything more. I know."

"You do? You've already heard that Donald's engaged? How?"

"I don't know," I smiled. "I guess I just knew it, that's all."

I was shocked at how easily God helped me meet what should have been a hurtful, difficult meeting. And when Donald brought Sandy, a beautiful young widow who had lost her husband in an accident, to Bible study three weeks later, we were seated next to one another.

She knew about me. In any other situation, this would have been awkward, to say the least. But I turned to her, a tall lovely woman whose dark features complemented Donald's good looks, and said, "Sandy, I'm really glad to meet you. I want you to know how genuinely happy I am for you and Donald."

She smiled and said thank you.

I told her, "I pray for you both every night. I praise God for what He's done in all three of our lives. I'm really excited about you both—especially your willingness to serve Christ." And I meant every word.

Friends and family members who knew how deeply Donald and I had cared for one another were amazed at my attitude. They had expected me to fall apart. And I probably would have gone to pieces if I had not allowed God to handle the situation.

I really began to see suffering in a new light—not as trials to avoid, but as opportunities to grab, because God gives so much of His love, grace, and goodness to those who do.

My life changed more during the last half of that year than any other period in life—even my previous five years in the wheelchair.

When Donald walked out of my life, there was no one in whom I could put my trust—except God. And since the Lord had always proved Himself faithful before, I trusted Him now.

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From JONI by Joni Eareckson with Joe Musser © 1976 by Joni Eareckson. Reprinted by permission of Zondervan, Publishers, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

LETTERS

From Beloved Brother Ubani, Sister Ubani, Brother Standhope, Sister Zion, and the Churches of Jesus Christ here in Nigeria, West Africa:

Unto Beloved Saints household of faith which are at New Jersey in the continents of America. Peace and mercy be unto you:

Enclosed is a picture of Beloved Brother Ubani and the members of the ecclesia here in Ibo. This precious little group needs your help, financially and physically. We appeal to you to mail 10 Bibles . . . .

Editor's Note: Ten Bibles have been mailed to Samuel Ubani by Fellowship in Prayer. Do any members want to contribute to this gift?

Dear Sirs:

In the November Newsletter of Fellowship in Prayer, a letter written by Alejandra Ambida touched my heart.

May the enclosed check cover a five-year subscription for her. I do not know what the current rate is. Please adjust the time accordingly.

Most lovingly, T.M., Bronx, N.Y.

Dear Sirs:

Back in the early fifties I visited Mercer Street in Princeton, New Jersey. The man I spent time with requested all the books I could get him on the Mass. I sent him seven books in German. Perhaps he realized that his equation E=mc2 was a source of physical power. The man was Doctor Albert Einstein. He seemed to me to be on the threshold of announcing his growing conviction that we have another tremendous source of power: prayer.

I give more credit to Doctor Einstein than the public realizes. He lived to sense that a "unified field theory" includes:

Knowledge, human and divine
Powers, human and divine
Laws, human and divine
Wisdom, human and divine
Finite and Infinite
Known and Unknown
Causes and Effects
Relationships.

Yours truly, C.M., Newark, N.J.

P.S. If any two men aboard a ship will offer to spend eight minutes a day praising God by reciting the Psalms of David, I will send them two small handy Daily Psalm Books. They will cost me $2. a book, but I will "storm heaven" to defray the expense. I challenge the men of the sea. I hope their answer is 'si.'"

•

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YOUR MEDITATIONS

This is the word of the Lord God to you and a charge to you all in the presence of the living God: be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come; that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people; then you will come to walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone.

—George Fox *(Example)*

The great error of the ages hath been to set up an outward order and uniformity and to make men's consciences bend thereto, either by arguments of the reason or by force; but the function of the true life is to leave the conscience to its full liberty in the Lord, to preserve it single and entire, and to seek unity in the light and the spirit, walking sweetly and harmoniously together in the midst of different practices.

—Isaac Penington *(Outward Religion)*

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If
a prayer
is needed for someone
or for yourself,
let us know.

Write
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Suggested BOOKS

Following are some of the books referred to in this issue.

SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL FOR GOD by Malcolm Muggeridge, Ballantine Books, New York.

THE SIGN OF JONAS, The Journal of Thomas Merton, Harcourt, Brace and Company, N.Y.

JONI by Joni Eareckson with Joe Musser, World Wide Publications, Minneapolis, Minn.

CHINESE RELIGION: AN INTRODUCTION by Laurence G. Thompson, Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., Belmont, California.

THE JOURNAL OF GEORGE FOX, revised edition, Cambridge University Press, England.

EARLY QUAKER WRITINGS, 1615-1700, Eerdmans Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, Mich.

Do Not Be Afraid to Pray

by Hartley Coleridge

Be not afraid to pray—to pray is right.
Pray, if thou canst, with hope, but ever pray
Though hope be weak or sick with long delay:
Pray in the darkness if there be no light.
Far is the time remote from human sight,
When war and discord on the earth shall cease,
Yet every prayer for universal peace
Avails the blessed time to expedite.
Whate'er is good to wish, ask that of Heaven,
Though it be what thou canst not hope to see.
Pray to be perfect, though material leaven
Forbid the spirit so on earth to be:
But if for any wish thou dar'st not pray,
Then pray to God to cast that wish away.